

POSSIBILITIES OF IMPLEMENTATION OF SMALL BUSINESS CHECK - UP METHODOLOGY IN COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES IN SLOVAKIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper is aimed to evaluate the possibility of applying new methods and tools of more effective educational processes, with an emphasis on increasing their quality especially aimed on educational processes at secondary schools and universities. There are some contributions from practice for the effective implementation of time management, such as reducing unnecessary delays, in order to increase the efficiency of education from the perspective of the provider of educational services – secondary schools and universities, as well as from the state as evaluating authority (accessibility of educational services, costs savings, time, etc.). The Small business check - up methodology can be the right and cheaper way for completing or replacement of actual monitoring system provided once per year in paper form and only in selected groups. The basic idea of this approach is to establish an appropriate system for exchange of information between individual schools and also among the state schools and institutions. The paper also deals with differentiation between quality level of schools across individual regions in Slovakia.

KEYWORDS

Educational process, e-learning, small business check - up, evaluation

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of information and communication technologies is associated with various aspects of life of modern society. Their application can be found in almost every segment of the work. The secondary education is not an exceptional segment, in which there is increasingly growing importance of e-learning support for education. There is an increasing demand for improvement of educational process at secondary schools and universities, as well as the ever increasing demands of external companies for graduates who master the latest technology require continuous innovation in the educational sphere and they need to be sure that every school with similar branch of study has the same level in quality of education.

From this reason the former approaches are not appropriate anymore because losing any chance for flexibility moreover the evaluation period is too long what causes delays in counter measure actions which have to be implemented as soon as possible. The most possible and reachable changes in these systems can be founded in base of some methodologies running at information technologies such as the method for development support in small companies "Small business check - up".

2. SMALL BUSINESS CHECK - UP TOOL METHODOLOGY

Diagnostic tool for enterprise "Small business check-up" was developed by the Council for leadership and management development in British Columbia, in abbreviation LMDCBC ("The Leadership and Management Development Council of British Columbia"). LMDCBC saw in the tool "Small business check - up" (further SBCH) a crucial initiative to improve leadership and management capacity of

small and medium-sized enterprises because the tool has increased awareness of the possibilities of innovation in society and the present investment costs that are spent on these innovations.

SBCH by its structure belongs to the so-called Business diagnostic tools (questionnaires or checklists) that provide a framework to help business managers and consultants in reviewing the activities of the company and identify potential areas of improvement. There were developed plenty of diagnostic tools over the years. These tools are mostly aimed at larger companies and associated with the sale of specific services such as consulting services or products, such as accounting programmes.

Therefore, the main aim in developing SBCH was to go beyond that what is currently available and create a new diagnostic tool with the following particulars:

- to be available on Internet with no additional cost for the user,
- to be aimed primarily at small and medium-sized enterprises,
- to be action-oriented, and not only to determine the current state of society, but also to establish a clear plan as currently identified condition innovate to improve the functioning of the enterprise.

As it was mentioned above the SBCH tool is fully available on free version through a web browser. Under the program the user is advised to answer firstly on many questions about the focus, background, objectives, strengths and weaknesses and management practices in the company, as well as the skills of the managers and the employees. Subsequently the tool allows user to compare his answers with other companies (of course in an anonymous way). It also provides a framework for reviewing company operations and identify opportunities for improvements. Once the user selects a number of priorities for improvement, SBCH will help to prepare a strategy and action plan for their implementation. Illustration of instrument SBCH web environment is shown in the following Figure 1.

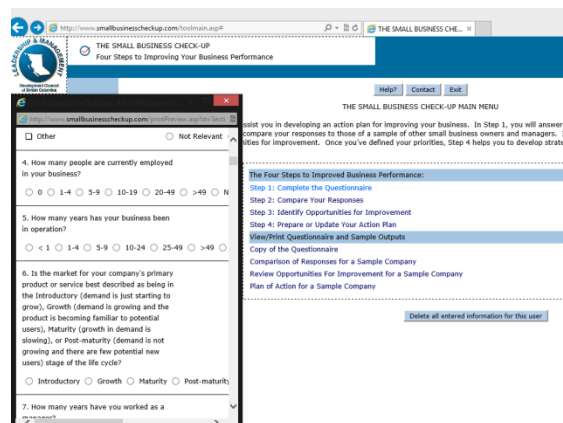


Figure 1. Web environment of „Small business check-up“ tool (Source: www.smallbusinesscheckup.com)

The instrument was designed to serve as a guide for improving management capabilities and efficiency of operational processes. Therefore it works only as a supplement in the strategy management and it should not be regarded as a substitute for commercial diagnostic tools such as accounting programs mentioned.

3. CURRENT METHODOLOGY FOR COMPARISON OF SCHOOLS

Regarding the evaluation of secondary schools in Slovakia it is currently carried out in the form of testing the knowledge level of students in the schools concerning basic subjects such as: Slovak language and literature, mathematics and foreign languages. Based on the results from individual subjects there were subsequently evaluated the average success rates for all schools and then in a county. In previous years, testing has shown that there are considerable differences in the educational level of individual students of secondary schools, as well as in 8 self-governing regions in Slovakia.

There are more than 720 secondary schools present in Slovakia with average grades ranged from 8.1 to 6, the disparities occurred in the level of secondary education according to various region. In the following figure 2 (MAT-mathematic, SL-English language) we can see that the biggest difference in the level of knowledge is in mathematics. This fact is a negative indicator from the point of view of

further educational process mainly because of differences in knowledge level and preparedness of secondary school students in continuing their studies at university.

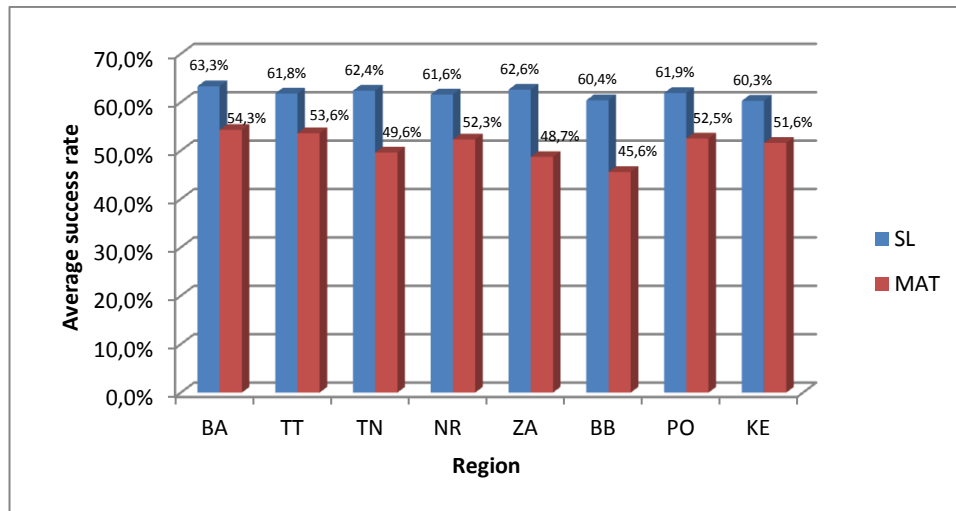


Figure 2. Average success rate in knowledge of Slovak language and mathematic on secondary schools by region (Source: http://www.nucem.sk/documents//25/maturita_2013/vysledky_analyzy/Pr%C3%ADloha_k_Spr%C3%A1ve_o_priebehu_a_v%C3%BDsledkoch_EC_a_PFIC_MS_2013_final.pdf)

Higher difference in the level of knowledge occurred when we compared schools according to their study program (figure 3) where we can see deeper knowledge gap between the level of mathematics knowledge as well as Slovak language and provider (figure 4), where we can see between students of different types of schools. This trend is caused to some extent due to the quality of educational staff (teachers and teaching aids), which the types of schools have in disposal.

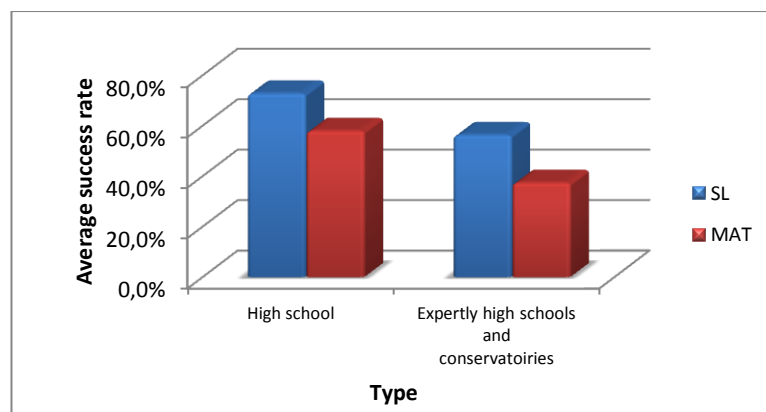


Figure 3. Average success rate in knowledge of Slovak language and mathematic on secondary schools by type (Source: http://www.nucem.sk/documents//25/maturita_2013/vysledky_analyzy/Pr%C3%ADloha_k_Spr%C3%A1ve_o_priebehu_a_v%C3%BDsledkoch_EC_a_PFIC_MS_2013_final.pdf)

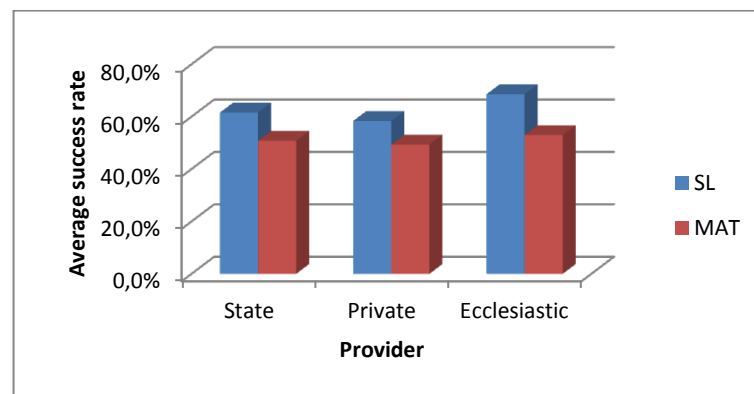


Figure 4. Average success rate in knowledge of Slovak language and mathematic on secondary schools by provider (Source:http://www.nucem.sk/documents/25/maturita_2013/vysledky_analyzy/Pr%C3%ADloha_k_Spr%C3%A1ve_o_priebehu_a_v%C3%BDsledkoch_EC_a_PFIC_MS_2013_final.pdf)

The basic principle of assessment does not change over the years - publicly available quantitative data are divided into five groups: 1) education (number of students, teachers, quality of teaching staff); 2) attractiveness of study (interest in the study, the proportion of foreign students, mobility, unemployment); 3) research (numbers of publications and citations, average citations); 4) PhD (proportion of graduates share of the student population, the scientific performance ratio of the number of PhD students); and 5) the grant percentage (domestic grants, international grants, the total income from grants for creative worker).

As we can see according to these criteria, many similar study branches at universities it do not reflect the level of knowledge that students should achieve in these fields of study. Evaluate mainly the number of students, teachers and the level of scientific activity or ability of graduates to get job after study. Therefore, for this reason it would be appropriate at least on some types of schools to establish informative comparison of the level of students' knowledge for example in the same fields as economics, management, mathematics, etc.

4. HOW CAN SMALL BUSINESS CHECK- UP SUPPORT EVALUATING SYSTEM

As it was mentioned above in major systems and methodologies for comparing in secondary schools and universities are not very time and cost-saving. They can be carried out only once a year and evaluation criteria are mainly in universities focused on performance and not on knowledge and skills of students and teachers. Implementation should be carried out as a main directive from ministry and basic tool built on SBCH methodology should be available on-line by web page based on web form application.

Secondary schools - with using the SBCH methodology thus developing an online form with the output to. NET graphical presentation of the results could be easily and quickly controlled the current level of preparedness of students at individual secondary schools. It would also be possible to carry out testing several times a year for example at the beginning of the individual grades, the bi-annual evaluation and year-end reviews. This form of continuous assessment could provide schools and government institutions timely with information about the progress of students in the tested subjects. Secondary schools would also receive a tool for continuous evaluation of their performance compared to other schools in the state and thus would have the opportunity to take corrective action even during the course before final assessment.

University – the modified SBCH instrument would be more effective as an additional evaluation tool in universities. On the one hand it could be used as a classic online tool to assess the knowledge level of students in similar branches of study and related theory. By these means the theoretical base could be effectively evaluated for individual universities. On the other hand the instrument could be used for testing the practical knowledge level of students in solving practical examples from business practice through case studies (in form of test questions). Also such testing would be possible to evaluate not only students but also teachers of universities and their ability to provide students with

relevant information necessary for practice. With this could be better described a point from universities ranking regarding graduate unemployment (why they are unemployed). Universities could reach by such testing a continuous image of balance between theoretical knowledge and practical training in the followed subjects. For university to be on the bottom of the list the annual evaluation could be test resource of the data in areas in which they could improve continuously during the year.

Pedagogical perspective - SBCH methodology could help predominantly to teaching staff in schools. Because its original purpose was to measure, benchmark and improve the skills of strategic management, this procedure can be applied also to improving the skills of the teaching staff. Staff of universities don't need to have examinations of pedagogical minimum and thus their teaching methodology resulting from their own approach and personality. By succession of well-chosen comparative test questions they could find potential weak points in their teaching practices and thereby improve their skills and could better interpret knowledge to students.

5. CONCLUSION

The effort of many developing countries mainly in the European Union is focused on the development of the school systems. The number one priority is to prepare graduates for their immediate application in practice after graduation. Graduates taking up practice often encounter problems due to lack of preparedness for the position in the company even if their field of study was aimed the position they were applying for. Due to varying degrees of preparation from different schools with the same fields many requests from candidates are filtered according company's experience with concrete school. It can thus be said that an equivalent degree in the same field does not necessarily guarantee equal chances in the labour market. Of course it is a relatively wide area where this issue is concerned but in its successive solving can also help testing methodology and continuous deeper comparison of results and teaching methods which we have presented in the paper. The SBCH methodology has been successfully implemented as a cheap and fast support for improving the skills of strategic management in smaller companies. If we take these small businesses as individual schools where appropriate departments and subjects taught to them and teachers as responsible managers we reach clear picture of options that this methodology could contribute to improve the level of secondary schools and universities not only in developing but also developed countries.

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